Graham; The Modern Prometheus

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Graham; The Modern Prometheus

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Summary

A Hannibal retelling of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Part of a larger series in which classic works of Gothic literature are recast with Hannibal characters. Each story in the series stands alone and does not have to be read in any particular order.

Notes

Will Graham: Victor Frankenstein
Hannibal Lecter: The Monster
Alana Bloom: Elizabeth Lavensa/Justine Moritz
Abigail Hobbs: William Frankenstein
Jack Crawford: Robert Walton

Chapter 1

It felt so macabre, waiting for the man to die. Perhaps not in and of itself, for the execution was public and a small group had gathered a few yards from the guillotine. It was his purpose for being there that caused Will Graham to fidget and look away when the prisoner gazed out at the crowd.

Could it be more defensible to stand before the square simply to see a man lose his head? Perhaps it was so. These people were acknowledging their instinct to see blood spill. More importantly, they had nothing to gain from his death except for the sense of justice in watching a murderer meet his end. Will Graham was waiting, staring at the man as he took his last breaths, not caring for justice or keeping the peace, but for the opportunity to steal his head. The basket it would fall into was filled with sawdust, as was the damp cobblestones around the dread apparatus. Not far from the square, Will could hear vendors advertising their wares. He could smell fried dough on the morning air. One street over were people who did not realize a man was about to die so close to them. They shouted mundane orders and requests while the man's chest began to heave and his eyes water as the executioner led him with hands bound to the chopping block.

The Monster of Ingolstadt, the newspapers called him. He didn't look very monstrous. Will had seen a drawing of him in the papers and thought his profile appeared regal, like the face of a Roman emperor on a coin. Looking at him now, though his hair fell in his eyes and his skin was sallow from the anticipation of these grisly proceedings, Will admired his high cheekbones, straight nose, and prominent lips. The body parts he had assembled thus far had been chosen for their aesthetic properties. If he was going to create life, it may as well be pleasant to look upon.

He shuddered with guilt once more at reducing a human life to an assortment of inanimate objects. Though he may be a killer, he was still a human being who felt fear and pain and all Will could think about was how that head of his would look sewn upon the lovely shoulders he had selected. They lowered his neck to the block and Will could see a tear fall down his cheek. He swallowed a pang of pity and allowed himself once more to think about how pristine the head would be when removed this way. There would be no damage to the skull or eyes, the brain would be deprived of oxygen for a relatively brief period of time, the nerves would all be intact. It was the perfect find.

The blade of the guillotine fell with a metallic swoop and a sound that was not unlike chopping broccoli. He watched the head fall into the basket, and kept his eyes on that basket as they moved it to the back of a wagon, until the moment when he nonchalantly strode by and grabbed it while the crowd dispersed and the executioner wiped the blood from the blade.

Will Graham's laboratory was actually a boarding room that he had transformed for his own purposes. It smelled like a charnel-house and looked it as well. The coppery smell of blood mingled with chemicals and salts. The table on which his stitched doll of a man lay was separated from his own messy bed by a thin curtain that he'd hung from the ceiling.

As Will attached the murderer's head onto his new body he wondered to himself what sort of person this would be. One man's heart, another man's brain, but whose soul? Perhaps something brand new would arise. Perhaps what he was truly inventing was a new species that would bless him as its creator and source. Many happy and excellent individuals would owe their being to him, and he would be their father and god.

It was one in the morning when Will finally began to stimulate his creation's brain. The limbs convulsed but grew still again after each zap of electricity. Outside a cold rain pattered on the window panes and the candles he worked by were melted to slouching nubs of wax, barely able to hold their flames alight. Sweat dripped from Will's hairline, his curls wild from running his hands through them in frustration. When he held the electricity to the brain once more he nearly screamed to see the body open its eyes. A strangling sound escaped the lips and Will watched his creature's chest heave hard. He brought the wires away and walked around to look into his eyes.

The creature blinked and stared ahead into space until Will lowered his head very close to him. Then his eyes focused and he looked back at Will. A small grin wrinkled at the corners of the creature's mouth and he muttered inarticulate sounds.

Will had thought ahead of time what he wanted his first word to be toward his creation. He decided that it should be the name he had chosen for him. That decision was also one he'd spent some time thinking about. When he finally managed to secure a head for the creature he stared back at it while he stitched it in place, considering what name would soon accompany that face. Looking at it he thought of ancient people, of great people whose formidable profiles adorned busts and vases. An appropriate name came to him then.

He cleared his throat, gazed into his creation's eyes and said as clearly as he could despite his trembling voice, "Hannibal."

Every day Will spent almost all of his hours with Hannibal. He put down a bed and blankets for him in the laboratory and showed him how to pull the blanket over himself for warmth. He brought him food and taught him how to hold a fork in his hand. Hannibal's dexterity was poor at first, but every movement his father made he watched with undivided attention and a sense of wonder. Will performed every action with emphatic gestures while enunciating each word to him. Bed, blanket, food, fork. Hannibal wasn't able to speak any more than the occasional guttural sound and a clicking at the back of his throat so Will taught him to make different hand motions to express when he was hungry or thirsty, tired, or confused.

Over time Will forgot that he had any life at all outside of Hannibal. The days turned into weeks and eventually he resorted to stockpiling food and drink so that he would not have to leave his boarding room. He observed Hannibal and wondered if perhaps he might be able to pass for normal amongst other human beings. He feared what might happen if they were afraid of his creation, and the thought of Hannibal being treated cruelly made him sick to his stomach.

One day, Will stepped outside to observe his surroundings. The street was mostly empty and he considered bringing Hannibal outside to see the sun and teach him that the world was at least somewhat larger than the room he kept him in. So far, that lesson extended only to pointing outside of the window.

Will felt something soft brush against his leg and he looked down to see a golden cat. The cat purred and Will knelt down to scoop it into his arms. He brought it inside to Hannibal.

“Cat,” he said, placing the animal down in front of him. He stroked the cat while looking at Hannibal’s expression.

Hannibal’s jaw dropped when he saw the tiny moving ball of fur. At first he recoiled from it as the cat minced along the table and crouched, pushing his back up and flicking his tail as Will ran his hand over it. Then he leaned forward and watched intently. He turned an ear toward it when it meowed. Hannibal made a light noise with his throat in an attempt to imitate it and Will chuckled.

“Meow,” Will said.

Hannibal looked up at him suddenly with surprise. Will took his hand and slowly led it toward the cat.

“Pet,” he said.

He placed Hannibal’s hand on the back of the cat and moved it along his spine as it purred and arched its back. Hannibal made a “p” sound and stared at his hand. The feel of the soft fur was curious to him. He pushed down on the cat and it slinked away. Will picked it back up and returned it.

“Gently,” Will said, showing him how. “Pet gently.”

Hannibal let Will move his hand for him, let the cat rub its cheek against the back of his knuckles. Then the cat jumped down from the table and began to explore the room. Hannibal watched him and Will scraped together bits of leftover food on a small plate which he put down for the animal. As Will crouched, Hannibal walked over to him and put his hand on Will’s head. He began to pet him, moving his hand through Will’s curls and over his face with his knuckles. Will bowed his head and looked up at him with a smile. Hannibal imitated his smile.

“Peh… jinty…” Hannibal said.

Will stood up and put his hands on Hannibal’s shoulders.

“Pet gently!” he exclaimed. He was quite proud. “Very good!”

Hannibal moved his hands over Will’s face and neck, looking at him the way Will had looked at the cat; with fondness and compassion. Will took Hannibal’s hand and gave it a kiss.

“Kiss,” he told him.

Hannibal made a clicking noise. He seemed disappointed that he couldn’t imitate him again.

“It’s all right,” Will assured him. He put his hand on the side of Hannibal’s face and began to pet him as well. He pushed his light brown hair back and ran his fingers through it. Hannibal closed his eyes and sighed, enjoying the sensation of being touched.

When the cat had finished eating the food, Will picked it up and put it outside. The animal walked away, tail moving back and forth. Hannibal watched him leave and made a noise when the cat rounded a corner and to his mind, ceased to exist. Will closed the door and led Hannibal to the window, to show him that the cat was simply on another side of the building.

That night Will lie awake in his bed wondering how he could show Hannibal the world without exposing him to any poor treatment. He wanted to be the best father he could possibly be. When he slept, he dreamed of his beautiful, innocent creation being bound and led to a guillotine. The crowd gathered again and they hissed that he was a monster and an abomination. Hannibal reached out to Will with his tied hands, a look of confused anguish on his face.

Will cried out as he awoke. He shivered and pulled his blanket over his shoulder, rolling over and trying to block out the horrifying image. Then he heard a noise; a cry that mimicked his own. He looked over and saw a silhouette through his curtain. A hand reached out and pulled it back. Hannibal looked down at him with concern.

“Hannibal,” Will sighed. “It’s all right.”

Hannibal walked beside Will’s bed and sat down on the edge. He reached out and began to pet Will’s hair, then his neck, and his shoulders. Then he lifted his hand to Will’s lips.

He clicked and said “iss.”

Will smiled and kissed Hannibal’s hand. Then Hannibal took Will’s hand and lifted it to his own lips, pressing them against it and nuzzling him.

“Back to bed,” Will told him. “Sleep.”

He lay down and closed his eyes. He opened them again when he felt Hannibal crawl under the covers with him.

“Hannibal,” he said.

Hannibal stared back at him and continued to run his fingers over Will’s features and his throat, his Adam’s apple, and the edges of his collarbone.

“Pet… genty…” Hannibal said.

Will’s broad smile spread over his face and he laughed happily.

“Very good!”

“Good,” Hannibal repeated. Then he leaned forward and pressed his lips against Will’s bare chest. He rubbed his cheek against Will’s body like a cat.

Will put his hands on Hannibal’s shoulders and embraced him. He rubbed his back and whispered in his ear, “Hug.”

Hannibal pushed into the hug, grunting. Then he gasped and pulled back.

“What’s wrong?” Will asked.

Hannibal lay back and looked down at the front of his drawers. His mouth parted when he saw himself swelling under the fabric.

“It’s all right,” Will said. It hadn’t occurred to him until that moment that Hannibal might need to be taught about something like this.

Will lay on his back beside Hannibal and threw back the blanket. He reached down and stroked the front of his own drawers. Hannibal watched him for a moment and Will gestured to Hannibal’s hand. Hannibal grunted and took hold of Will’s hand and placed it over his erection.

Will froze. He stared at Hannibal in surprise, but his creation just closed his eyes and began to rub himself up against Will’s hand. His mouth hung open and happy noises emerged from his throat.

“Pet,” he urged. “Iss.”

What am I teaching him? Will wondered. But he didn’t pause for long. He felt the urge to show Hannibal intense pleasure; to give him every sort of love in this world. He slipped his fingers into the front of Hannibal’s drawers and began to fondle him.

Hannibal moaned and arched his back into Will’s touch. Will rolled over and hovered above him, stroking him. He dipped down and kissed Hannibal on the lips. Hannibal’s eyes popped open and he stared back at Will.

“Kiss,” Will whispered, and kissed him once more.

Hannibal put his arms around Will and brought him to his chest, humping against his hand.

“’Ug,” he said.

“Hug,” Will repeated. He kissed Hannibal’s chest and nuzzled him while he stroked. He felt Hannibal’s hand drift over the front of his drawers and begin to massage him. He moved his hips with him, and reached down to release his cock from the fabric.

Hannibal watched Will swell and stiffen as he touched him. He smiled and kissed him. He looked a happy sort of confused and curious. Then his eyes opened wide and he moaned as his body began to convulse. Will stroked him faster murmuring, “It’s all right,” in his ear. Hannibal experienced his first orgasm since he had risen and he watched in disbelief as cum spat out of his cock over Will’s hand. He threw his head back and bucked his hips at the last moments, overcome with the new sensation.

Will kissed him on the cheek and Hannibal pushed against him, staring at Will’s cock as he ran his hands over it. Will repositioned the way he held him and showed him how to stroke. Soon he was moving his hips along with the motions and moaning.

“Very good,” he groaned, “Hannibal. Very good.”

Will came onto Hannibal's hand and the creation stared at the milky fluid for a moment before leaning over and kissing Will's cheek.

"Good," Hannibal whispered.

Chapter 2

When Will woke up very early in the morning he looked down at Hannibal. As his creation slept, he looked once more as though he was dead. His puckered scars seemed to shine in the light through the window.

Will swallowed. He felt overcome with disgust for himself. What had he done? He climbed out of bed and paced the room, chastising himself for his actions the previous night. He had considered himself a father to this new life-form and he had abused that position. Not only that, but he had engaged in sexual acts with a reanimated corpse.

He began to suffocate. His head pounded. He grabbed his hair and bent over, sweat beading on his forehead. He needed to get out. He couldn't look at Hannibal a second longer, not after what he had done.

He packed a bag and left the house, desperate for some kind of balance. He found himself boarding a train for home. He yearned to surround himself with human beings once more, if only for one day.

Alana Bloom was orphaned at a very young age and had come to live with the Graham family as one of their own. Since childhood, she and Will played together and shared their most intimate early moments. He had grown to love her. After Will's own parents died, they shared the pain of orphanhood and she was a tremendous comfort to him in his time of grief. When he saw her standing outside of his old home, and saw the beaming smile on her face when she recognized him coming up the path, he sighed with relief. This was what he needed. He wrapped his arms around her tightly as though afraid she would disappear.

"Will!" she greeted him. "You should have told us you were coming. I have someone to introduce to you."

She led him inside and brought him to the sitting room where a young girl sat petting the family dogs.

"This is Abigail Hobbs," Alana introduced. "She lost her parents as well and has come to stay with us."

"Abigail," Will smiled at her.

Abigail stood and greeted him.

"I feel as though you are already my brother," she said. "Alana has told me so much about you."

Will walked with Alana and Abigail in the garden outside of the house. He tried to allow his fears to melt away as he watched Abigail run and play with the dogs and stared into the eyes of Alana Bloom.

“You have gone so long without writing,” Alana said. “I was worried about you.”

Will nodded and grimaced.

“I have been preoccupied with a project,” he explained. “I am sorry I’ve neglected you.”

“Are you all right?” Alana asked, her smile fading. “You look quite ill.”

“Do I?” Will responded. He rubbed his face and his hands grew wet from the sweat that had gathered on his brow.

“Perhaps you should sit down,” Alana suggested.

She and Will sat on a bench in front of a row of rosebushes. The heady scent was like an intoxicant. He tried to clear his mind, but the image of Hannibal’s face beside him in bed continued to intrude on his thoughts.

“Abigail is very bright,” Alana said as she took his hand. Will twitched and stared at her fingers entwined with his. Her skin was smooth and cool. “I think you two will get along famously.”

Will nodded and looked out over the garden at the young girl. She threw a ball and the dogs scampered after it. When it landed on the grass it rolled for a couple of yards and came to stop at a pair of bare feet. They were covered with mud. Will’s eyes trailed upward and he saw Hannibal standing there, hands bound, reaching out to him. He could hear indecipherable gibberish coming from his open mouth.

Will stood up suddenly and the rush went to his head and he stumbled. He looked back as one of the dogs snatched up the ball and returned to a giggling Abigail. There was no one there. Will blinked and tried to step back toward the bench.

“Will?” Alana asked, “Is something wrong?”

Will felt a wave of nausea overcome him. He slumped down before he could reach the bench and fell backward, smacking his head on the hard wood.

“Will!” Alana cried out.

Will opened his eyes occasionally. He felt a sickening heat and saw blurry visions of people standing over him. Their voices were murmuring and he couldn’t make out the words. They melted into the sounds of Hannibal trying to speak. He couldn’t move. The sheets felt wet and heavy against his skin.

Dreams floated through his subconscious. Hannibal lay in bed with him, touching him as he lay frozen. His lips trailed over his chest and down his belly then wrapped around his cock. He moaned and tried to move away, but his limbs were heavy as cinder blocks. The creature’s wet mouth sucked on him and he felt suddenly euphoric. Then a terrible pain shot through him. He looked down to see Hannibal biting into his cock, blood trickling out around his teeth and over his lips. He screamed and rolled over, suddenly feeling a rush of gravity as his

upper torso hung over the side of the bed and the floor seemed to float into focus and ground him with a thudding sensation.

“Will?” he heard Alana’s voice. Gentle hands lifted him up from the edge of the bed and rolled him over on his back. Her sweet face and chocolate brown hair came into his vision and he grasped her arms for leverage.

His eyes darted to the side as someone else entered his periphery. A doctor in a coat pushed a thermometer into his mouth. Alana ran her cool fingers over Will’s forehead and he sighed and closed his eyes as it relieved his hot skin.

“His fever has broken,” the doctor said, removing the thermometer and looking at it. “Bed rest for at least another week and plenty of water.”

“You must have had some kind of infection that you picked up in Ingolstadt,” Alana explained. “You have brain fever. It’s good that you came home when you did.”

Will relaxed into his pillow for only a moment before suddenly sitting up.

“Lie down, Will,” Alana instructed. “You need your rest.”

“How long have I been sleeping?” he asked.

“Four days,” Alana said.

“No,” Will gasped, trying to climb out of bed. “No, I must get back.”

“Absolutely not,” the doctor insisted, packing up his gear. “You are not to travel. Stay in bed.”

The doctor walked out, tipping his hat to Alana.

Will turned to her and whispered, “I have left very important work at my place in Ingolstadt. It is imperative that I return at once.”

“We will send someone to pick up whatever you need,” she assured him.

“No,” Will shook his head and rubbed his face. “I must attend to it myself.”

“For god’s sake Will, haven’t you been listening?” she said. “You have brain fever. Can you leave your work for just a short while?”

Will thought about what must be happening in Hannibal’s mind. He had been alone for four days, ignorant and scared and running out of food. His heart cringed at the thought. He lay back on his pillow and patted Alana’s arm. As soon as she had kissed him on the forehead and left the room, he leapt out of bed and got dressed. He opened up the French doors and slipped out into the garden.

The door to his boarding room in Ingolstadt was standing open a crack. Will felt a sickening rush of anxiety. He entered and looked around the room. The food had all been eaten, and his

equipment had been pushed over and scattered about. Every cupboard had been thrown open and the mattress of his bed was upturned and tossed to the side.

“Hannibal!” he called out. He darted around, looking in the closet and behind every surface. He ran outside and along the alleyway between the buildings.

“Hannibal!” he called. He felt panic overtake him and he stumbled along, bent over and crying the name again and again. “Hannibal!”

The next day Will received a letter from Alana Bloom, asking if he had returned to his Ingolstadt residence and she begged him to come back home and heal from his sickness. Will couldn’t bear to leave the room for more than the occasional trip to ask his neighbors if they had seen a tall man with scars leaving the area. No one knew what he was talking about. If he was gone for more than an hour, he ran back quickly hoping to find that his creation had returned.

After several days, the family butler and a footman arrived to find him lying in bed, pale and thrashing and crying out for Hannibal. The butler and footman gathered him up and took him back to his home.

“He should not have left,” he heard the doctor tell Alana. “His condition has been set back again. He must rest.”

“I’ll keep an eye on him,” she promised.

Will slept during the day, haunted by terrible nightmares of mobs with torches and pitchforks hunting down his beloved creature. At night, he couldn’t bear to sleep at all, staring out of his window and wondering what Hannibal was thinking and feeling. It was unbearable.

“This work of yours must be terribly important to you,” he heard a young voice say. He turned to see Abigail standing in the doorway.

“It means more to me than anything in the world,” he muttered.

Abigail looked down.

“That and my family,” he added.

“Alana has become like my family now,” Abigail said, sitting on the edge of his bed.

“We both lost our parents at a young age as well,” Will said. “We are a family of orphans.”

“But a good family, nonetheless,” she replied.

Will smiled.

The days passed and Abigail came to visit him every day, bringing him books that he requested and reading them aloud to him. He introduced her to Blake, Keats, and Lord Byron. He found great joy in watching her learn and speak her mind on her education. It was a paternal sort of pleasure, to see a young mind working and blossoming under his guidance.

Most of all, he was not responsible for her so completely that it was a burden to him. He found this sort of fatherhood to be nothing but rewarding.

After she read to him Byron's Manfred he asked, "What did you think of it?"

"It was lovely," she gushed. "The language was divinely inspired. But…"

She paused for a moment to consider her thoughts.

"But what?" he coaxed.

"I found Manfred rather despicable," she confessed.

He chuckled, "Why is that?"

"He has done wrong to the one he loved," she said. "And yet, all he feels is self-pity."

"Is he not sincerely ashamed of his actions?"

"Guilt is an unconscious emotion," Abigail responded after some thought, "Our reactions to it conscious. Instead of truly acknowledging himself and seeking to make correction he is manifesting his guilt as a form of martyrdom. 'Oh this woman suffered and that makes me suffer; poor me.'"

He laughed, proud of her sense of conviction over the matter.

She continued, "What Manfred most longs for is not justice upon himself or even to undo his actions, but to forget what he has done. He sees this whole ordeal as something that needn't be remembered or learned from at all, lest it should cause him any pain."

Will swallowed.

"I think…" he started, and then stared out the window. "I think I should enjoy going outside for a little while. Will you walk with me?"

The two of them stepped out into the garden and Will smiled and sighed as the mid-day sun warmed him. The dogs ran to greet him and he crouched down, laughing and petting them.

"I've taught them some new tricks," Abigail boasted.

"Show me," he replied.

Abigail ran out into the grassy clearing and called to the dogs. They darted after her and she frolicked with them, turning her finger in the air. They rolled on the ground and stood up on their hind legs.

"They can sing as well!" Abigail called to Will as he joined them.

"I would very much like to hear them sing," he said.

Abigail broke into song, her light feminine voice trilling in the fresh air. The dogs sat like choir boys and howled along with her. Will laughed heartily.

“Very good!” he exclaimed.

Abigail giggled and bumped into him as the dogs brushed against their legs with tails wagging. Will wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tight.

This is healthy, he thought to himself. *This is good.* He kissed the top of her head and then looked off at the edge of the garden.

His face dropped when he saw in the far off trees a hooded figure. His face was darkened by the edges of his cloak and the shadow of the trees. He thought his heart would stop when the figure stepped forward a moment and allowed the sun to cast light on his face. Will blinked and shook his head, but he knew this was no illusion.

Hannibal stared back at him. His expression was deeply ominous. An ephemeral snarl passed over the man’s lips and his amber eyes peered back at Will in accusation.

Will pulled away from Abigail and walked toward the trees, but the hooded man slipped away into the shadows.

“What is it?” Abigail asked as Will pushed into the bushes and looked around.

“Nothing,” he whispered. Hannibal was gone.

Chapter 3

Not long after Will had begun to recover, Alana Bloom fell ill. She came down with a high fever and was kept in bed. She thrashed and muttered in her sleep, and spiraled into delirium. Will and Abigail kept vigil at her bedside every day, but more often than not she didn't seem to understand what they were reading or saying to her.

One night Will checked on her and found her sweat-soaked bed was empty. He found her wandering in the garden talking to herself.

"Alana," he whispered, coming up behind her and guiding her back toward the house. "Let's get you back into bed."

"Am I dead?" she asked as he lowered her into her bed.

"No," Will answered, stroking her damp hair away from her face. "You are alive and you will get well again."

"I don't think so," she said.

"Why don't you think so?"

Alana gazed out of her window at the moonlight and shadows that scattered over the garden.

"I saw Death."

"You were dreaming," Will assured her.

Alana shook her head.

"He came to me," she insisted. "He was tall and beautiful, in a dark hooded robe. He had a scar that wrapped around his neck like a ghastly choker."

Will stood up and walked to the window. He peered into the shadowy corners of the yard.

Alana continued, "I had always imagined what death incarnate might look like. I never knew I would recognize him if I saw him, but that was him. He was silent, but his eyes shone words into my thoughts. I could hear his voice in my head, and it was like poetry."

Alana shivered and Will quickly covered her with a blanket.

"Sleep," he told her, "And pray dream of something else."

Alana's sleepwalking became more frequent as her fever resisted all attempts to break it. Will slept on the lounge in her bedroom. He was awakened by a crash in the night and ran into the bathroom where Alana crouched over the shards of a broken looking glass. She was pushing the glass into her neck and dragging it along her skin, leaving behind a thin red choker of her own.

“The persistent fever is driving her into madness,” the doctor told them. “I suggest you strap her down to her bed at night, lest she hurt herself.”

Will couldn’t bear the thought of doing that to her. He locked the two of them into the room together at night, and stayed awake as much as he could.

Alana awoke when she heard a murmuring sound coming from Abigail’s room. She pressed her ear to the wall.

“Poetry…” she whispered.

She tried the door, but finding it locked, she opened up the window and slipped out onto the ledge. Her bare feet trembled as she scooted along the ledge up to Abigail’s window and found that it was open. She peered into the room, and a hand reached out to her to help her climb inside. She looked up and smiled.

“It’s you,” she whispered in a quivering voice. “Have you come for me?”

The screams shocked Will out of his slumber. He jumped up and looked at Alana’s empty bed and saw the open window. He unlocked the door with the skeleton key he kept in his pocket and ran out into the hall.

“Oh god Miss Bloom, what have you done?!”

The maid stood outside of Abigail’s room, both hands clasped to her mouth. Will pushed past her. His eyes first fell on Alana, who was sitting on the floor and staring at her hands with a dazed expression. They were covered in dried blood. Her white nightgown was stained as well. The sheets of Abigail’s bed were pulled down onto the floor where she sat. He ran to her, trying to find where she’d cut herself.

“Mr. Graham,” the maid cried, pointing at the sheets. “It’s Miss Hobbs.”

Will turned on his haunches and followed where her finger pointed. Wrapped in the sheets on the floor, Abigail lay with her eyes open and focused on nothing, a knife plunged deep into her throat.

“I can’t believe that she could do this,” Will insisted to the police when they arrived. The doctor was droning on to the inspector about Alana suffering from a brain fever that drove her to madness.

“It wasn’t me,” Alana said as they slipped cuffs onto her wrists. “It was death.”

Will was stunned. Could it be Hannibal who did this? Had he truly brought a monster back to life? He pushed his fist against his forehead and followed the police as they nearly carried Alana to the carriage.

“Wait,” he gasped. “It wasn’t her!”

“Who else could it be?” the inspector asked.

Will couldn't speak. He was suddenly filled with terror at the prospect that the world would discover what he had done. That he had stolen body parts, including the brain of a known murderer, and brought them back to life, only to set the creature loose on the world.

But how could this be Hannibal's doing? The gentle, inquisitive person who he had created could never be responsible for such butchery. And who would believe his story? He was the first to ever achieve permanent reanimation of a dead organism. Surely they would think he was insane.

The inspector looked away from Will in his silence.

"She's being taken to hospital," he told him. "When she recovers from her fever she will be taken to prison and tried for the murder of Abigail Hobbs."

"No," Will croaked. He reached out for the carriage as it took Alana away.

Tell them, his thoughts shouted at him. *Confess everything and face the consequences of your actions.* But he just watched, heart sinking in his chest.

Will buried Abigail in the family plot outside of their house. He stared at the numbers on her headstone delineating a very short life and erupted into tears.

"I am the cause of all of this," he said to her grave. "I sought to bring life into this world and I've brought nothing but death and chaos and pain. I am so sorry, Abigail."

He received word that Alana had emerged from her fever and went to visit her in the hospital. She sat in the white bed, gazing ahead with eyes as glassy and unfocused as Abigail's were in death. Her gown seemed to him as a mourning shroud.

"They'll be taking me away soon," she said in a flat voice, "To the prison, where I belong."

Will shook his head.

"You said there was someone else in the room with you," he told her.

A tear rolled down her cheek and she looked away from him.

"I thought I saw death incarnate," she recalled. "I thought he had come for me, but it was her that he wanted. It was all a terrible dream."

"Perhaps not," he replied.

Alana released a dry chuckle and wiped the tear away with the back of her hand.

"It was me, Will," she said, "Only me and Abigail in that room."

"Try to remember," he coaxed.

"I don't want to remember!" she cried. "Oh god, Will. I killed that poor girl. I can't bear it."

“No, no.”

“I know you don’t want to believe that I could do such a thing,” she sobbed, “But I took the life of someone I loved. I can’t stand being awake with my thoughts, but when I try to sleep I only see her in my dreams. She cries to me from her bed. Her blood…”

Alana choked and covered her face.

“My hands are drenched in her blood.”

Will left the hospital with a heavy pit in his stomach. If only he could find Hannibal, he could bring him to the authorities and prove to them that such a creature existed.

He heard a commotion on the streets outside. A crowd began to gather and they pointed up at the façade of the building. Will turned and looked at where they were pointing.

Alana had climbed out of the hospital window and teetered on the edge of it. A twisted sheet was wrapped around her neck.

“Alana, no!” he screamed up at her.

“I’m sorry," she called down to him. “Farewell, sweet Will, my most beloved friend. May heaven, in its bounty, bless and preserve you. May this be the last misfortune that you will ever suffer! Live, and be happy, and make others so."

“You weren’t dreaming, Alana!” he called out. “Death is real. I will find him!”

Alana looked up at the sky. He thought he could see her smile for a moment.

“I do not fear Death,” she said. “What a relief it will be to see him again.”

She stepped off of the ledge and fell like a stone.

“Alana!” Will screamed.

She fell with a snap and her body slammed against the exterior of the hospital building. Will ran inside and pushed his way through the nurses who were dragging her body up through the window.

“No! No!” he screamed, gathering her up in his arms.

He couldn’t let go of her hand. He clutched it still as her body lay on the table in his parlor. Will pressed it to his face and cried. In a matter of days, his entire world had ceased to exist.

“Death is real,” he murmured to himself. “Death is real.”

He had excused all of the servants of his household and sat alone in near darkness. When he sensed the presence behind him, he didn’t even have to turn to know who it was.

“You,” Will whispered.

A deep, intense voice broke through the silence and caused him to shiver. The creature could speak.

“Hello Father.”

Chapter 4

Will sat still as Hannibal crossed the parlor and pulled up a chair opposite him, on the other side of Alana's body.

"How could you do this?" Will asked.

Hannibal cocked his head and craned his neck, peering back at him with unflinching golden brown eyes.

"I didn't kill Alana," he said. "Your negligence did."

Will stiffened and looked away from Hannibal's gaze.

"You have a penchant for negligence, though, don't you?" Hannibal added.

"Your, ah…" Will stammered. "Your grasp of the language…"

Hannibal chuckled.

"I was forced to continue my education on my own."

"For that I am deeply sorry."

"Your apologies mean nothing to me," Hannibal muttered. "They will not heal me of my pain."

Will couldn't bring himself to look at him.

"Where did you go?" he asked. "When I was gone?"

"That is a story," Hannibal told him.

"Tell me," Will urged.

Hannibal sucked his bottom lip between his teeth and began, "I woke up in bed alone. I didn't know why I was alone, and I didn't know where you were. I searched around the room, and the only context I had in this world was gone from it. When the food ran out I grew hungry, a sensation I was not accustomed to feeling. I remembered, after some time of anxiety, the cat you had brought inside. I remembered how when it left the house, I thought it was gone as well. You showed me that it had only passed around the corner. I left the room and turned the corner myself, half expecting to see you standing there, arms ready to embrace me. I was wrong."

Will cringed and hung his head.

"I rounded corner after corner," Hannibal continued, "Looking for you. I passed by strange people whose faces I didn't know. I approached them, trying to communicate my needs, but

they would push me away, scream at me, and hit me. I ran. Finally I came to the edge of town. I learned so much so quickly; cold, starving, afraid, lonely, confused, tired, sore. I used my sense of smell to find garbage to eat from. I learned that things that smelled particularly foul would give me pain after I ate them. I finally found a farmhouse with a garden. I crept into the garden and took as much food as I could carry back to a hovel I had built. It was the first time in what seemed like ages that I didn't feel pain in my stomach.

"I watched the people in the farmhouse. They were a mother and father and little boy. I learned how to start a fire by watching them, and which vegetables should be cooked and which could be eaten raw. I liked to watch the little boy play on the fence around the garden. The mother and father would hug him and stroke his hair and kiss him. I wanted to join them so badly, but I was afraid that they would be frightened of me just as the people in the city were. Even so, I could tell that they were unhappy. I couldn't understand everything they were saying, but they cried… as I had often cried since being alone. After a while I began to comprehend their words. It was coming back to me, the memory of language buried in my brain. I learned that they were suffering. They were afraid that they would be homeless like I was, starving and cold, like I was. I felt intense pity for them, realizing that my situation was the worst possible fate for any person. I wondered why you had left me to this."

Will buried his head in hands.

"As my recollection of language resurfaced, I discovered that their home did not belong to them. It belonged to another man to whom they owed payment. The next thing I learned was a source of great horror to me."

Will looked up at him with a questioning expression.

"They could not pay the man," Hannibal continued, his voice cracking, "Because they earned their money selling the food from their garden. And they couldn't do that because…"

"You had taken it," Will replied.

Hannibal's jaw clenched. He sighed and straightened in his chair.

"Next lesson," he said in a grim tone. "My existence causes suffering to others."

Will shook his head.

"It wasn't your fault."

"It matters not whose fault it is!" Hannibal snarled. "The lesson remains the same."

"What did you do?"

"I stopped stealing immediately. And then the pain returned. I pulled bark from the trees; I picked mushrooms, anything to stop that horrible feeling in my gut. It was better than the feeling I had when I realized what I had done to this family. I gathered firewood for them and left it on their doorstep. They seemed pleased when they found it, and warmed themselves.

They spoke kindly of this stranger who had given them the gift. I wanted to do more for them. I wanted to help them in any way I could. Then the man came."

"The owner of the house?"

"Yes," Hannibal said, his face growing dark. "He was despicable. He spoke to the family as though their lives meant nothing to him. He could help them, but he was only cruel. He smiled when he told them they would be evicted. When he walked away from the farmhouse I felt a strange emotion overcome me. I suddenly experienced a recollection, as if from a past life, of how I must act when I felt that way. I walked up behind him and beat him over the head with a hunk of firewood. When I was done I felt deliriously happy."

"You killed him?" Will asked.

"I did," Hannibal replied. "And then I was no longer hungry."

Will looked confused.

"I cut up his body, cooked him over the fire, and ate his flesh."

Hannibal smirked when Will's jaw dropped.

"I took his head to the family's front porch, and left it on top of a new batch of firewood."

"Oh god, Hannibal," Will whispered.

"I didn't understand their reaction," Hannibal explained. "This man had been a source of struggle in their lives, and yet they were appalled to see him in such a state. The father vomited like I did when I ate rotten food. The mother cried and held her son, covering his eyes so he would not see what I had done. I hated myself once more, for causing them even more pain. I left the family alone, knowing that nothing I could do would be anything but harmful to them. I packed up what was left of the meat, retraced my steps, and found your room in the city once more.

"When I arrived I went through your belongings and found this." Hannibal took a large satchel off of his shoulder and dropped it on the table. Papers and books spilled out. "I looked over the words and, after some time, I began to understand that they correlated to language. Again, the memories of my past knowledge came back to me and I was able to read. Slowly at first, but soon I was reading everything I could find."

Hannibal plucked a clipping from inside of one of the books and handed it to Will. It was an article about the capture of the Monster of Ingolstadt.

"I found this as well. I saw that my own face was printed on it, and I read it. That's when I learned what I truly am."

Will took the clipping.

"What?" he asked.

“A monster!” Hannibal hissed, his head darting forward and his eyes glinting.

Will dropped the paper and looked back at him.

“Why did you bring me into this world?” Hannibal muttered through his teeth. “Why would you take something that should have been dead and give it life once more?”

“This isn’t you,” Will insisted. “You were good and gentle. You could learn to be…”

“I didn’t learn that,” Hannibal sneered. “I learned to hate.”

Will shuddered and looked away again.

“I wanted to know why you abandoned me,” Hannibal went on. “I found a document with the location of this home printed on it, and I came to find you. When I saw you, you were with her.”

“Abigail,” Will whispered.

“You were hugging her, praising her, kissing her. I had been replaced with someone better, someone you favored to me.; someone for whom you would abandon me.”

“I didn’t want to abandon you,” Will croaked.

“Then why did you?”

“I was scared!”

Hannibal sat back in his chair.

“Frightened by me, as everyone else is,” he said.

“I was scared of myself!” Will cried. “I didn’t trust that I could be a good father to you. I couldn’t bear the responsibility, so I ran away. Oh god, Hannibal…. I was terrified to have someone so innocent who relied on me so completely when I should never have taken that upon myself.”

Hannibal’s face softened.

“I tried to find you once more,” Will said. “Maybe I didn’t try hard enough. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“I hated her,” Hannibal murmured. “She was everything I couldn’t be and so I hated her so intensely that it made me sick. Far worse than I felt for that landlord.”

“You didn’t have to kill her,” Will replied.

“I felt like I did. Then this woman came in the window,” he gestured at Alana. “She was different. She looked into my eyes and touched my face. She called me Death, but she wasn’t afraid. When she knelt beside Abigail and put her hands on her wounded throat, I felt…”

Hannibal swallowed and his eyes grew wet.

“I deeply regretted what I had done. I fled. It wasn’t until later when I found a newspaper that I realized what had happened to Miss Alana Bloom, the beautiful, strange woman who wasn’t afraid of me.”

Will gazed down at Alana.

“And then I hated you,” Hannibal growled. “Because I knew that you could have saved her.”

“They wouldn’t have believed me,” Will replied.

“Did you even try?” Hannibal asked.

Will closed his eyes and shook his head.

“I am this way, because I am lonely,” Hannibal mourned. “You can’t even imagine this pain; being alone in this world. It’s…. unendurable.”

Will stood up and walked over to Hannibal. He kneeled beside his chair and put his hand on his shoulder. Hannibal flinched for a moment, and tears began to well up in his eyes.

“Forgive me,” Will pleaded, staring up at him. “I have been so careless. Please forgive me.”

Hannibal reached out a hand and hovered it over Will’s head. It trembled for a moment then he lowered it into his curls and petted him. Will sniffed and lay his head down on Hannibal’s leg.

“I know nothing I can say will erase the hell you’ve been through,” he said, rubbing his cheek against Hannibal’s hand. “I wish I could take it all back and start again.”

Hannibal lifted Will’s face in his hands and leaned down. Will rose up on his knees and kissed him. Hannibal’s hands drifted down to Will’s neck and he pushed into the kiss eagerly. Will stood up and Hannibal pulled him down to straddle his lap, passing his fingers over the young man’s collar and chest, under his shirt. Will rocked forward and pressed his body against Hannibal’s. He kissed his neck and Hannibal reached down the front of Will’s trousers and fondled him.

Will suddenly stopped and pulled back, squeezing his eyes shut and shaking his head.

“No,” he said. “I can’t.”

“Afraid again?” Hannibal murmured. His eyes narrowed.

Will nodded.

“It isn’t natural,” he replied. “You and I... we can’t do this.”

He stood up. Hannibal glared at him.

“Then give me someone who can,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“Make me a companion,” Hannibal explained, “Someone like me; someone who can love me.”

“That would take some time,” Will answered. “I need to gather the body parts.”

Hannibal stood up and gestured at Alana. Will’s eyes grew wide.

“I can’t do that,” he said.

“Why?” Hannibal asked.

“Not Alana,” Will replied. “I can’t make her into...”

“Into what?” Hannibal retorted, “A monster? The thing you were so ready to turn me into?”

Will hung his head.

“Please don’t ask me to do this.”

Hannibal grabbed Will’s face and forced him to look at him.

“You owe this to me,” he said. “And I promise you, she will be loved. I will never allow her to suffer as you made me suffer.”

Will stared back at him. He saw the pain in his eyes, the intense loneliness he must feel.

“All right, Hannibal,” he whispered. “I will.”

Chapter 5

Hannibal carried Alana in his arms as Will led the way into his home laboratory. He laid her down on the table, gently cradling her neck. He pushed her brown hair out of her face and smoothed it behind her ears. Will watched him touch her, so tenderly, so affectionately. He brushed him away and went to work on setting her neck and opening her chest cavity to stimulate the heart.

Hannibal observed Will's actions with great curiosity. He carried Will's notes in his satchel with him, but he didn't need them. Will had brought life back into a body before, and he could do it again.

Many hours later, Will had opened up her skull and was ready to apply electricity to her brain. Hannibal sat next to her, holding her hand as though he was beside her sickbed, waiting for her to emerge from sleep. Will stimulated her brain and her body twitched and her eyelashes fluttered momentarily. Hannibal gasped and glanced up at him with a broad smile. Will saw him lift her hand to his lips and kiss it as he caressed her cheek. He nuzzled her fingers and laughed quietly to himself as his eyes grew wet. He looked as happy and excited as he did when he was first born. More so, even.

Will dropped the wires.

"I'm exhausted," he said. Hannibal furrowed his brow inquisitively. Will wiped his hands on a cloth and added, "I need to sleep, and so do you. We'll continue in the morning."

Hannibal stood and leaned over Alana. He gave her one last kiss on the forehead and went to bed in a spare room.

Will checked on him after a while to make sure he was asleep. Then he gathered Alana up in his arms and carried her outside to the yard. He laid her down on a pile of wood and gazed at her.

"I won't let this happen to you, Alana," he whispered. He doused her and the wood with kerosene and lit a match.

He stood back and wiped a tear from his cheek as he watched her burn. Suddenly he heard a noise from behind him. Hannibal was rushing toward him.

"No!" Hannibal roared. Will put his hands up to stop him but Hannibal shoved him to the ground and stumbled toward the pyre. He stopped when he saw her flesh was completely consumed by the fire.

"Why?" he moaned, clutching his head.

"Not her," Will called, lifting himself from the ground, "I can't bring back someone I loved. I just can't."

“No!” Hannibal cried, advancing on him. “This isn’t about her, is it?”

“It is,” Will insisted. “Choose a stranger. I swear to you, anyone you like.”

Hannibal clutched onto Will’s collar and lifted him so that his face met his.

“You will burn them as well!” Hannibal snarled. “You don’t want me to have anyone in this world who isn’t you!”

He dropped Will and his eyes narrowed into reddened slits as he added, “And you won’t let me have you, either. You are determined to keep me alone.”

“I am sorry,” Will muttered. “You know I am filled with terrible love for you, and I wish it wasn’t so. I will make you someone…”

“I’ve had enough of your promises!” Hannibal shouted and grabbed Will once more, turning him around and wrapping his arm around the young man’s throat.

Will kicked and struggled, but Hannibal held him tightly. His vision blurred as he choked for air and finally fell into unconsciousness.

When Will opened his eyes again he was in his laboratory. He stood up and grasped his pounding head. Hannibal had taken his satchel of notes and in its place was a scrap of paper. Will picked it up and squinted at what was scrawled upon it, the words tangling before his eyes. He shook away the stupor and focused.

Do not follow us, it read.

“Us,” Will repeated aloud, and his eyes grew wide. He ran outside to the family burial plot and fell to his knees when he saw what awaited him.

Abigail’s grave was unearthed, and her body removed. Will dropped on his hands and screamed at the empty hole in rage and pain.

“How much suffering is enough for what I have done?” he moaned. “Everyone I love, everything I touch is tainted!”

He placed his hand on his throbbing chest and sat back on his haunches. Abigail’s timeline seemed to glare back at him.

“Am I damned?” he asked her gravestone.

He thought of bright, vocal Abigail and what she would say to him.

“Instead of truly acknowledging himself and seeking to make correction he is manifesting his guilt as a form of martyrdom,” he heard her words echo back.

He shuddered with self-loathing.

“To hell with me,” he spat through gritted teeth. “And to hell with the thing I’ve created.”

He stood up and stalked away from the burial plot.

“I will find you,” he promised. “If I must die trying, I will find you, Hannibal, and free you from the prison of life I brought you into.”

Captain Jack Crawford’s ship groaned as it slowly crushed through plates of ice. A thick fog surrounded them from all sides and he warned his crew that they must venture through carefully.

“Need I ask if anyone on board has slain an albatross recently?” he shouted. His shipmates laughed, but it was an anxious sound. The ice was growing thicker, not weaker. Soon they would be halted and have to climb down and break the ice with tools. It would be treacherous work.

He had written to his wife, Bella, words of self-promotion for his journey. He would discover the secrets of the magnet and regulate a thousand celestial observations. Now it looked as though he may have to return unsuccessful, with very little stories to tell aside from how cold and bleak this part of the world is.

He looked across the jagged plane as sunlight pierced through the fog and nearly blinded him when it reflected off of the whiteness. He lifted a hand over his eyes and peered at something dark on the horizon.

“That isn’t what I think it is,” Crawford muttered, and pulled his telescope from his coat. He pointed it in the direction of his previous gaze.

“Who in the hell…” he gasped. On a low sledge, pulled by a pack of dogs, was a man wrapped in fur; a man where no man should ever be. To his further astonishment, he could see another figure wrapped in bundles on the sledge itself. It appeared to be a young woman.

Crawford alerted his crew and they blew the deep, whale-cry of a horn. The sledge didn’t stop, but flew over the far drifts out of sight.

The captain was baffled by the appearance of travelers, but he was distracted a couple of hours later when the ice began to break apart and the ship pushed through bobbing floes onward.

The next morning one of his shipmates awoke him.

“Captain,” he said. “There’s a man on the ice. He may be dead.”

Crawford climbed out of bed and dressed himself quickly. When he arrived on deck, his crew had lowered themselves down to a sledge stranded on a floe and brought up an unconscious man wrapped in fur. The dogs that pulled his sledge had apparently been cut free.

The young man, though lying still in the coldest region of the world, was burning hot to the touch and slicked with sweat under the fur. His face was tinged with white frost, but he was

still breathing.

“Bring him to the cabin!” Crawford ordered.

The ship’s doctor examined the young man, who moaned and gnashed his teeth in his sleep, and came to the conclusion that he had some form of brain fever which was exacerbated by hypothermia. He ordered that he be rubbed with brandy and force-fed water and soup.

When the young man finally awoke, Crawford came to his bedside.

“What is your name?”

“Will Graham,” the young man replied.

“Will Graham, you are lucky to be alive,” Crawford told him.

“Thank you for helping me,” Will responded, “But before I stay on this vessel I need to know in which direction you are headed.”

Crawford’s jaw dropped.

“Before you stay…” he retorted, “Did you not just hear me? You are lucky to be alive.”

“I’m sorry,” Will said, laying his head back on the pillow. “You have my gratitude for rescuing me.”

“We are headed to the North Pole,” Crawford answered his question. Will looked relieved. “Why in god’s name are you out here?”

“To seek one who fled from me. I have chased for months, my heart filled with hatred at first, something for which I despise myself now. At this time, I only wish to see a beloved face once more.”

Crawford remembered the travelers he had seen upon the ice.

“A man and a young woman?” he asked.

Will looked pained.

“I must find them,” Will insisted. “I have made so many grievous errors in my life. Pray that you will never be as selfish with love as I have that you must journey to the ends of the earth just to beg forgiveness.”

“Now you must rest,” Crawford said. “You are still feverish and your life is still in peril.”

“I thank you for your sympathy,” Will replied. “But it is useless. My fate is nearly fulfilled. Nothing can alter my destiny.”

“What is your destiny?”

“To sacrifice myself on the altar of love and save my soul from eternal damnation.”

“You’re delirious, friend,” Crawford answered. “Please, sleep.”

Will did sleep, but his fever didn’t break for a moment. He spent his days in what appeared to be a world of nightmares, crying out in his bed.

Crawford stood out on deck and once again spotted something on the horizon. He peered through his telescope and saw a man watching his ship pass. He couldn’t see his face, but he had a pensive stance and a curious tilt of his head.

The next morning, Crawford received word that his newest passenger, Will Graham, had died in the night. He sighed and ordered that the young man be wrapped in linens and left in the cabin bed until they could reach a port and discover where he came from.

“Such a tragedy,” Crawford said at the dinner table, accompanied by the doctor, “But there was something in his eyes; an expression of madness that seemed to extend beyond his fever and into his very soul.”

The doctor nodded.

“I saw it as well.”

Crawford continued, “It will torment me forever what it could be that drove him to such madness. He spoke of love as though he had committed crimes against the idea itself.”

They began to eat their meal when all of a sudden a horrible cry rang out. It was a deep wail of intense grief and agony.

Crawford leapt from his chair and ran to the cabin where Will’s body had been prepared. Looming over the body was the sledge-driver himself, tall and lean and shuddering with sobs. He had ripped open the linens that wrapped Will’s body and now shed tears upon his lifeless face.

“Father,” he cried. “If you wished vengeance upon me, then you have achieved it.”

“Who are you?” Crawford asked. He could see a hook with a rope leading out of the window where the man had climbed on board his ship.

“I am a monster,” the stranger replied. “And this is my last victim.”

The man gathered Will’s body up in his arms and carried him toward the window. Crawford stepped forward to stop him, but the look of pain in the man’s eyes kept him from advancing further.

The stranger pressed his lips against Will’s ear and whispered, “Soon these burning miseries shall be extinct.”

Crawford watched as he climbed out the window and lowered himself to a raft below.

The creature opened his eyes and squinted from the light. He had no thoughts in his mind, no words on his lips, only a mingling of strange sensations. He felt a repetitive tugging at the top of his head, and his arm flailed for a moment upward.

A face came into view above him; a sweet, pretty face that triggered something inside of him, a sense of recognition and affection. She smiled and her mouth moved but all he heard was a buzzing sound. Then another face hovered over him; a pair of golden-brown eyes and a thin smile. His heart beat faster and he reached out to graze his fingers over the features. The buzzing sound faded from his ears and he could hear the lulling murmur that escaped the man's lips.

"Will," the man said.

It soon became clear to him, as they helped him from the table and led him around the cabin, that Will was what he was called. They spoke it to him every time they handed him a piece of food or an object to be touched.

"Abigail," the man called the girl.

"Hannibal," she called him.

"Family," they both said when they stood together, placing their hands on each other's shoulders as well as his and smiling at him.

He and Hannibal curled up on a soft fur rug in front of a fire, which was, as they told him, "hot," and Abigail sat in a chair with a book on her lap. She read aloud while Hannibal held Will close to him. She seemed to struggle with the words, but every now and then she would look at Hannibal and he would smile and nod and say, "Very good, Abigail."

Will crawled over to her lap and peered at the book. He saw a picture of a man standing on the edge of a precipice, looking very distraught. The image sparked something in his mind and he realized that it was connected to her somehow. He pointed at it and made a small clicking sound in the back of his throat.

One night he awoke to the sound of Hannibal crying softly in bed next to him. He rolled over and cocked his head, touching the wetness that fell from his eyes and over his cheeks.

"It's all right, Will," Hannibal assured him.

"Fam-ee," Will whispered, trying to see him smile again.

"Family," Hannibal repeated. "Very good."

Will sighed and laid his head on the man's chest. Hannibal ran his fingers over his back and kissed the top of his head.

"Kiss," he said.

Will pressed his lips against Hannibal's chest.

“Pet gently,” Hannibal said with a teary smile, caressing the side of Will’s face. Will lifted his hand and imitated the movement against Hannibal’s cheek. A memory traipsed through his mind and his eyes widened.

“Pet… genty,” he replied.

Hannibal sat up and kissed Will’s lips, again and again, then pressed up against him. Will whimpered pleasurably at his touch and embraced him.

“I love you, Will,” Hannibal sniffed, rubbing the young man’s back and nuzzling his neck. “Beyond life, beyond death, I will love you.”

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